

Initial DCS Ombudsman Report
Summary of Activities
December 14, 2009 to January 15, 2010

The DCS Ombudsman assumed the responsibilities of the office December 14, 2009.

Preparation, Planning and Research: To assist in defining the role of the DCS Ombudsman and function of the office, a thorough examination of IC-4-13-19 was conducted to ensure that legal mandates were included in the procedures and goals developed for the office. Other Ombudsman programs were researched, including a review of websites and annual reports, interviews with others holding the position, and a site visit. A network of Ombudsman colleagues available for consultation was created by obtaining membership in the USOA (United States Ombudsman Association).

Critical DCS policies, procedures, data, initiatives, reports and research were reviewed to develop a working knowledge of the current processes, initiatives and where/how to access pertinent DCS information. The history of events leading up to the development of the Department of Child Services during 2005 provided the background necessary to understand the current direction the department has engaged.

Operational Procedures: To implement a process for receiving and addressing citizen complaints, a procedure was developed. It is anticipated the procedures will evolve as the office grows and the current version is a draft, with the final version to be developed. A database was developed to track complaints and investigations. A toll free number was installed for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau. A website was developed providing information about the DCS Ombudsman Bureau, including a printable complaint form. As of January 15, 2010 the Bureau had received eighteen complaints. Of these eighteen complaints, three were accepted for investigation, and the first investigation was initiated January 15, 2010. The remaining sixteen complaints were handled as Information and Referral Only contacts or did not fall within the jurisdiction of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau.

DCS Liaisons: Meetings were scheduled with the Director of the Department of Child Services to identify key liaisons within the department and communication was established with those parties. Arrangements were made to have the automated child welfare information system installed on the Ombudsman computer and training was provided. Regular meetings were scheduled with the DCS Deputy Director of Field Operations to establish communication procedures between the DCS Ombudsman and field staff. Procedures were developed for the DCS Ombudsman to liaise with local Child Protection Teams on case reviews.

Outreach: Contact was made with various advocates/community partners to discuss shared interests and concerns regarding DCS issues. Meetings with representatives from the State Fatality Review Team, the State Office of GAL/CASA, Prevent Child Abuse Indiana, and the Indiana School of Social Work were scheduled. The Ombudsman has been invited to participate in the State Fatality Review Team and the Citizen Review Panels.

Administration: The process for hiring an Executive Assistant in conjunction with the Department of Corrections Ombudsman has been initiated. Many states utilize volunteers in Ombudsman programs, and this option is being researched as a potential resource for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau.

Future Goals: The following goals have been set for the first year of operation for the DCS Ombudsman Bureau.

- Complete procedural manual.
- Continue to receive, attempt to resolve and/or investigate citizen's complaints.
- Submit reports with findings and recommendations when required and implement appropriate follow up.
- Develop a plan to inform the public of the DCS Ombudsman Bureau.
- Maintain database and case tracking.
- Ongoing communication with DCS regarding Ombudsman activities.
- Continue to meet with community partners and participate on teams and boards addressing DCS issues.
- Identify potential issues to comprise systemic investigations, and timetable for such projects.
- Hire Executive Assistant.
- Initiate volunteer program.
- Submit reports as required.
- Continue self-directed Ombudsman training. Attend USOA Conference and Ombudsman training in October 2010. Independent study of Gareth Jones's book, Conducting Administrative, Oversight & Ombudsman Investigations.